WHEN UŊALAQŁIQ DANCED: STORIES OF STRENGTH, SUPPRESSION & HOPE

By

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Abstract

In the late 1800's, the Evangelical Covenant Church established a mission in Uŋalaqɬiq (Unalakleet), a predominantly Iñupiaq community along the Norton Sound in Western Alaska. Missionaries were integral in establishing a localized education system under the direction of the General Agent of Education, Sheldon Jackson, in the early 1900's. By 1915, the community was no longer engaging in ancestral practices such as deliberating, teaching and hosting ceremonies within the *qargi*. Nor were they uplifting shared history and relationships between villages or expressing gratitude for the bounty of the lands through traditional songs, dances, or celebrations such as the *Kivġiq* Messenger Feast.

In my research, I focus on events that occurred in Uŋalaqɬiq around the turn of the 20th century and analyze how those events influenced the formation of the education system and its ongoing impacts on Native peoples and communities today.

My intent in undertaking this research is to grow a shared understanding of how this history continues to shape our lived experience as modern Native peoples and to promote healing and strength through the potential revival of ancestral traditions that have kept us healthy and strong for thousands of years.

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I offer my gratitude to the Dena'ina, on whose unceded traditional lands I live, raise my children, work, and study, for their perpetual stewardship of Dgheyey Kaq' (Anchorage) and outlying areas.

I lift up the Dena people of the lower Tanana River, on whose unceded traditional lands the Troth Yeddha' Campus is located in Tanan (Fairbanks) as part of the University of Alaska system.

For you, the reader, I offer gratitude to the indigenous peoples of the places you live and work, for their eternal care of the lands protects them for us all.

Preface

An elder from Southeast once recounted a story to me of transformative healing and reconnection to her Tlingit cultural traditions. She shared that as a child, she had been sent to boarding school in the 1950s, where she was harshly punished for speaking Łingit, and quickly learned to speak English and abandon her peoples' cultural ways in order to avoid harm and "fit in" at school and elsewhere. Over time, she grew to harbor distaste for Tlingit traditions, language and knowledge.

One day, her granddaughter asked ıf she would teach her how to speak in Łingit. This elder harshly rebuked her, saying that she shouldn't waste time on Łingit, but should instead become very skilled at reading, writing and speaking English to better succeed in life. Her granddaughter was sad, but didn't argue with her. Weeks and months passed. Some time later, her granddaughter asked her to attend a performance of the Tlingit dance group she had joined. Again, this elder harshly rebuked the granddaughter, saying she wanted nothing to do with Tlingit singing or dancing. Her granddaughter asked that she at least watch their performance to show support of her family. The elder agreed.

Watching her granddaughter proudly sing in their language, and dance to the beat of the drums that their ancestors had danced to since time immemorial, the elder felt – for the first time in her memory – a connection to who she was always meant to be. Watching her granddaughter dance to the songs that link them to all of their past, present and future ancestors – at an age when her own expression of who she was as a Tlingit girl was ruthlessly punished – she began to experience a healing of her youthful self

This elder believes that her granddaughter brought her profound healing by guiding her back to her culture and true self in a way that no one else could have. Our healing happens intergenerationally, and in real time.[1]

[1] Anonymous, Personal conversation with author, March 21, 2016.

The past is not a burden; it is a scaffold which brought us to this day. We are free to be who we are – to create our own life out of our past and out of the present. We are our ancestors. When we can heal ourselves, we also heal our ancestors, our grandmothers, our grandfathers and our children. When we heal ourselves, we heal Mother Earth.

– *Pamiovan Rita Pitka Blumenstein (Yup'ik from Tununak)*

Introduction

Paġlagivsi! Ayyuġuruŋa, Inupiaġuruŋa Uŋalaqłiqmiuġuruŋa. Aapaka Talialuk lu Pan'niuq Qassataq. Aŋayuqaak Doug lu Sitaktun Qutquq Herdman. Qitunġatka Kutuukhuq lu Talialuk, paniġak Qanigluk, nukaqłiġa Inuaathluuraq. Iñuuruŋa savaktuŋalu Dena'ina-t nunaŋanni Kisaġvigmun.

I am Ayyu Qassataq, Iñupiaq of Uŋalaqłiq (Unalakleet). My grandparents are Stanton and Irene Katchatag, and my parents are Doug and Vernita Herdman. I have four beautiful children: *Kutuukhuq*, *Talialuk*, *Qanigluk* and *Inuaathluuraq*. I live, work, and raise my children on the unceded traditional lands of the Dena'ina Athabascan peoples in Dgheyey Kaq' (Anchorage).

To understand the research I am presenting in this project, you must understand me… my heart, my passion, and the experiences that have led to this very moment. It is important to me that you, the reader, understand and accept that I fully acknowledge that this writing only represents my knowledge of these topics for this moment in time. My understanding will continue to evolve and grow as my experiences do – just as my introduction invites people with knowledge of our homelands and people to share with me, so too does this research.

By the very act of committing to writing the information I have picked up along the way, I am inviting correction and a deeper level of knowledge than I currently possess. I welcome the enlightenment that this opportunity will bring me, and I ask for forgiveness for any error I may make along the way. I am an imperfect person navigating a society that was not structured for Indigenous peoples' success through our own measures – more on this topic later.

Throughout my childhood, I split my time between Dgheyey Kaq' and Uŋalaqłiq – and though I did not realize it then, I learned many of my hardest lessons during my school years in

Dgheyey Kaq'. At the same time, I derived strength and developed my foundation as an Iñupiaq person during summer and fall in Uŋalaqłiq with my grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins.

My grandpa *Talialuk*, a passionate advocate for our ways of life, would stand before federal, state and tribal governing bodies and say, "sovereignty, to me, is a way of life that was already established here before the migration of people." In his own way, he was affirming that Alaska Native peoples have been, and always will be, responsible to this place. I inherited this sense of perpetual stewardship and deep responsibility to fight for our ancestral right to thrive as Indigenous peoples in the ways we always have.

I currently work for First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native nonprofit currently based in Dgheyey Kaq', where I have had the great honor of working with and for our community since 2010. In our work, I have found alignment between my passion for serving and uplifting our Alaska Native peoples and communities and my profession. A guiding principle of FAI's work is that Alaska Natives know best what is best for Alaska Natives. Our work uplifts the brilliance of Native knowledge and solutions to meet the challenges facing us.

I believe that each of us was born with gifts that are needed in our time, and that these gifts do not belong to us – they belong to our community. I feel that it is our responsibility to grow these gifts in service to our communities and society. My passion is to deeply understand the history that has shaped the context that Alaska Native peoples are living in today. I plan to build upon that understanding in a way that puts my work, my education, and my gifts toward the healing and thriving of our people and communities in the short time that I have here on this earth.

I remember the first time that I experienced the awe and power of our ancestral practices through Alaska Native dancing. It was during one of the first Alaska Federation of Natives' (AFN) Quyana Nights in the early 1980's, when AFN first organized the cultural celebration *Quyana*

Nights to thank Alaskans for supporting the Native community with their vote to uphold our ways of life.[2] I can still close my eyes and feel the powerful Iñupiaq drumbeats sync up with my heartbeat. I still feel the awe in witnessing our own people powerfully singing and beautifully dancing to songs that connect us to our ancestors. I felt the tremendous urge to get up and dance with them! When I looked at my mom and grandparents, I was surprised by how still they were. Their eyes shone with connection and longing, but there was something else there – something I could not understand – that compelled me to sit still, too.

Years later, I asked my grandma, *Pan'niuq*, why I did not see our Native dancing in Uŋalaqłiq. Her response was, "Oh, those were gone long ago. They are no more." Her tone was definite, with no room for further questions or conversation. I continued to watch other communities' beautiful singing and dancing with longing and wondered, what would it be like to express myself in our way? What would it feel like to stand in solidarity with our community, the women standing strong together, our men supporting us from the back and front? What would it be like to feel our powerful connection to our ancestors' physical expression of who we are and to live the knowledge of our rich history encoded in the songs and dancing?

Decades later, I found myself on a journey that many of us do – to seek understanding of our peoples' history in order to better understand the challenges we face today. What were the external forces that put our tradition of singing and dancing to sleep? What other traditions have helped our people through hard times? After all, our very existence is a testament to thousands of years of adaptation applied to making a good life on beautiful lands that others may view as harsh, isolated and unforgiving. How might the good medicine within our traditions be awoken and

[2] AFN, "Quyana Alaska."

applied to our current context? To answer these questions, I began my own personal research journey.

Three years ago, during a small Indigenous Succession Planning convening hosted by FAI, a young Koyukon man by the name of *Yaadoh* Tristan Madros of Ggaał Doh/Takaatlee' TonDenh (Kaltag) recounted the history of their Stick Dance protocols, including their Mask Dances (which are also held during the new year). In his description, he mentioned that their Mask Dances had come to them from Uŋalaqłiq many years prior. This was the first time I had heard of this – let alone that there were Uŋalaqłiq songs or dances still living and breathing anywhere in the world. I was hungry to learn more.

Yaadoh recounted to me that in the early 1900's, the missionaries were suppressing Uŋalaqłiq's traditional practices. Consequently there was an intentional effort to bring songs and dances to Ggaał Doh and Noolaaghe Doh (Nulato) to protect them. These two inland Koyukon Athabascan villages (located inland to the east of Uŋalaqłiq) adopted and put into practice this Iñupiaq/Yup'ik tradition and people from Uŋalaqłiq would travel at new years' time by dogsled to Ggaał Doh and Noolaaghe Doh to experience our singing and dancing once again. According to *Yaadoh*, his grandfather told him that the five individuals who brought the Uŋalaqłiq songs were John Cerosky and his wife, Old Man Stanley and his wife, plus one other.[3]

Yaadoh put me in contact with Ggaał Doh's Traditional Chief, *Taaloheelno* Mary Rose Agnes, who after a long conversation, told me she was willing to ask her community to share the songs with Uŋalaqłiq. This exchange set in motion a chain of events leading to their community offering our songs back to us on October 10, 2016,[4] with a commitment to teach what they know

[3] Tristan Madros, Facebook message to author, December 26, 2019.
[4] Native Village of Unalakleet Public Facebook post, October 11, 2016

of them. I recounted this story in greater detail during my keynote address for the Kawerak Leadership Summit in Sitŋasuaq (Nome) October 2017.[5] I wanted to share this lesser known history with our communities and region.

This experience led me to the UAF Rural Development Master's program in a roundabout way. In researching the history that explained the suppression of our ancestral practices, I encountered multiple barriers. These roadblocks have led me to feel that my community's knowledge and history has been locked up behind the privileged walls of the universities – in their libraries and databases. I found that the knowledge that had been drawn out of our cultural bearers by researchers in the 1960s and 1970s was often only accessible through the university system itself. This precious knowledge, extracted from those last few with deep firsthand knowledge and experience of living practices, had been captured and memorialized for the researcher's own personal and professional gain. This is a process which Māori scholar, *Tuhiwai* Linda Smith, describes as "Researchers enter[ing] communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets."[6] I do not blame the individual researchers, nor accuse them of malice. Rather, this is how the Western imperialistic academic system is constructed, which is a big part of the problem.

Research conducted on Indigenous peoples without inclusion of our collectivist worldviews, without taking responsibility to co-create analysis with us, or without being accountable by sharing results with the community, situate Indigenous peoples on the Outside of our own knowledge. In Uŋalaqɬiq's case, much of the information that could help me to understand

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[5] KNOM, "Leadership Summit Keynote Urges Hope, Resolve in Native Community"
Though it feels very strange to cite myself – I offer this merely to share the extended story for those interested in learning more. Full audio of the keynote is linked at the end of the article.
[6] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Methodologies,* 25.

how our practices were put to sleep was only accessible through the university system itself.

Though it has pained me to pay tuition to an institution that was in large part responsible for the stripping of our knowledge, the timing was right for me to go back to school. It was the right time for me to do this research and it is my ancestral birthright to learn about our peoples' history and practices. An unintended outcome of this graduate research was the opportunity to document my experiences in navigating the university system as a Native person, in the hopes that it might contribute to the repatriation of ancestral knowledge back to our communities. I challenge the universities to strengthen and help to perpetuate (rather than remove and commodify) the Indigenous knowledge they are complicit in having removed.

Through this Master's project, my intent is to:

- document an Indigenous perspective of the complex relationship between the establishment of the mission and education system in Uŋalaqłiq;
- deepen collective understanding about how the ancestral practices that were put to sleep during this era can help to strengthen the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples; and
- weave in stories of other communities' successes in waking up their traditions and sharing knowledge for healing and wellness.

My greatest hope is that waking up our traditions will strengthen my community and those of other Indigenous peoples.

I always feel deep within myself the urge to live a traditional way of life – the way of my ancestors. I feel I could speak my Native tongue, but I was raised speaking the adopted tongue of my people, English. I feel I could dance to the songs of my people, but they were abolished when the White man came to our land. I feel I could heal a sick one the way it was done by my ancestors, but the White man not only came with their medicine – they came with diseases... First, the White man came and abolished our song and dance, then they took control of our land and its resources, and then they shoved us into a life totally unknown to us...

– *Polly Koutchak (Iñupiaq of Uŋalaqliq)*
testimony to the Berger Commission, 1985

Ownership

Ownership is a funny concept. The Academy's assertion of knowledge ownership – including creating the barriers that I personally encountered in trying to access my peoples' knowledge – is harmful. I am paying the University so that I may matriculate in a program that will help me to advocate for education reform. There is irony in paying an institution that was/is complicit in stripping our peoples' language, ways of knowing and living, spirituality, and our even our own histories. Dr. *X'unei* Lance Twitchell, a Tlingit/Haida/Yup'ik/Sami scholar and leader described the injustice in this way, "Our knowledge was taken from us full-strength and concentrated. With our fight and resistance, it is given or sold back, diluted."[7]

This research was conducted by compiling and analyzing secondary data that already exists and belongs to my community. I aim to create building blocks of information that may be shared with Uŋalaqɬiq to shape and share as we see fit. I also aim to create a foundation for myself and others' to continue to deepen this resource. To do so, I plan to share my research in its entirety with the Native Village of Unalakleet, our Unalakleet school leadership, and our region's leadership. I plan to make a community presentation in Uŋalaqɬiq this summer, and will offer assistance in crafting curriculum or other materials that may offer fuller perspectives of our community's history beyond the scope of this project.

Additionally, while this research focuses specifically on Uŋalaqɬiq, it tells a story that impacts all Native peoples, therefore I presented my oral defense publicly through an online platform. I will also share this research or the recording of my defense freely with any Indigenous persons to use and build on.

[7] Twitchell, "Remarks to UAF Rural Development Seminar and UOC Masters in Māori Indigenous Leadership cohorts." October 3, 2018

Background and Limitations of Research

Our traditional Iñupiat education system exemplified good relations within our collective community. It was built upon the inherent gifts and talents each of us are born with – intended to be put to their highest and best use for the strength of our whole community. In an article for the Harvard Educational Review, Iñupiaq scholar *Kisautaq* Leona Okakok (from Utqiaġvik) explained our original education in the following way:

> The traditional education of the Iñupiat people focused not merely on survival but on excellence. Although all children were expected to master the basics of subsistence living, the inclinations exhibited by each child were noted and nurtured. All specialties were needed in order for the culture to survive. A storyteller and philosopher was as integral to the community as a good provider or an excellent seamstress. Once an Iñupiat Eskimo child shows an inclination, such as an interest in archery, storytelling, or sewing, that interest is nurtured by all concerned with his 'education.' He or she may be apprenticed to a relative or another member of the community who is an expert in that field. Certain other areas of education may be deemphasized so that the child may develop his or her talent…
>
> Once Western education models were introduced into our culture, the nurturing of individual interests virtually stopped. No matter what the unique interests of the child, all were taught the same subjects, at the same pace, in the classroom.[8]

By the late 1890s our traditional education systems were replaced with the proliferating Western education system, which began as a partnership between missionaries and Territory of Alaska under the leadership of General Agent of Education, Sheldon Jackson. During this period, the policy was to replace Native languages with English in order to speed up the assimilation and "civilization" of Native students. In a February 1888 article in the *North Star*, Jackson stated that,

> "The Commissioner of Indian Affairs urges, and very forcibly too, that instruction in their vernacular is not only of no use to them but is detrimental to their speedy education and civilization… [when] pupils are required to speak and write in

[8] Okakok "Serving the Purpose of Education." 416.

> English exclusively…the results are tenfold more satisfactory than when they were permitted to converse in unknown tongues."[9]

In 1890, the law required that classes with Native students must be conducted entirely in English.[10] This effectively cut us off from the very languages that we used to express thought, transmit knowledge and the good thinking of our peoples. It separated us from thousands of years of knowledge encoded within our languages, and has had far-reaching, detrimental impacts that still show up today.

In November 1991, Traditional Chief and deeply respected Yup'ik elder, *Aaquqsaq Kangrilnguq* Paul John of Cevv'arneq (Old Chefornak), spoke of how separating us from our language disconnects us from that critical source of strength:

> In this whole world, whoever we are, if people speak using their own language, they will be presenting their identity and it will be their strength. That is the way it has always been. Our language should not be lost since we have always spoken it…
>
> At times you see two people speaking the same language. As you watch them, you would not be able to talk with them even if you wish. The two would seem like their language was their strength. We Yupiit during this time are like paupers borrowing another language when we speak… As I carefully assess the situation, when we don't use our own language, it's like we would actually remove our power in the eyes of our counterparts, borrowing another language even though we are Yup'ik.[11]

Traditionally, our people would learn our histories and ways of being organically through continual exposure. Storytelling and ceremonies, including singing and dancing, are just a few examples of the application of this knowledge on a daily basis. Our children were with us constantly; observing, helping, participating, and growing into higher levels of responsibility. Our ways of living were our ways of learning about who we are and where we come from.

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[9] Krauss, "Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present and Future." 95
[10] Ibid, 95.
[11] Fienup-Riordan, *Qulirat Qanemcit-llu Kinguvarcimalriit: Stories for Future Generations*, xlix.

According to *Kisautaq* Leona Okakok, in the 1930s and 1940s, teachers instructed parents to only speak to their children in English within their homes. Since many knew very little English, this effectively cut off communication between parents and their children in many families.[12] Prior to the establishment of the missions, our rich knowledge had been perpetuated orally through our Native languages and traditional practices. The ramifications continue to today – through the compulsion of a Western academic education system – as information about us, our languages, and our traditional ways has been tucked into the invasive, foreign and written English language. This has effectively cut us off from the perpetuation of our ways of knowing by replacing it with Western information intended to assimilate us into "civilized" culture.

A written language is only accessible to those with access to it and who have the ability to read it. Prior to the establishment of the missions, Indigenous people had access to Indigenous knowledge by simply listening and gleaning it through storytelling in everyday and ceremonial life. Today, because of the imposition of both the English language and its written system of transmitting information, Indigenous knowledge has become progressively privileged into outside institutions, and is used less and less as a means of knowledge perpetuation.

Academic researchers derive acclaim and professional glory by extracting information from our Indigenous communities. This has come at a high cost to Indigenous people including the present day financial cost to access said knowledge. Our ancestral birthright, our peoples' knowledges – which have evolved over thousands of years – have been captured and privileged into research papers, books, or put behind paywalls in databases that require membership or monetary compensation. Research institutions have now been paid at least twice over for this

[12] Okakok "Serving the Purpose of Education." 409.

information; first, to replace our knowledge in the first place; and second, for Native students' individual efforts to reclaim it.

For the 13 years of my primary and secondary education and the 9 years of my undergraduate education, I was force-fed someone else's idea of what was important knowledge, laced with toxic misrepresentations of Indigenous people. As an Iñupiaq woman of Uŋalaqłiq, I should have been raised in an environment infused with the Indigenous knowledge that I now seek as a 40-year old adult who is actively re-educating herself every single day to reclaim who she really is. Our Indigenous knowledge is my ancestral birthright, yet it has been stolen from me and entire generations of my people.

To understand the inherent limitations of this research, one must first acknowledge that Native students in Western academia, such as myself, face unique challenges to reclaiming our cultural and ancestral knowledge. We have been separated from the language of our ancestors (and the rich knowledge contained within it) while we actively pursue our education through the very same Western system that has actively harmed us. The limitations of my research include:

- an inability to recapture the underlying Indigenous knowledge that has been squirreled away in academic writing, where each publication has rabbit-holes filled with distorted perceptions of my people;
- lack of time as a working professional to read through and analyze all of the relevant material; and
- my deep distrust and dislike of the academy for all it has and continues to represent to our peoples.

We need a complete rewrite of our peoples' history, told through our own methods and worldviews. Such an effort would be free from the prejudices transmitted through the writings of

our colonizers that has never done justice to the wretched true history of the education system in Alaska and across Indigenous lands throughout the world.

Methodology, Data Collection and #realtalk

There is a critical difference between Western researchers, with their aspiration to objectivity and theory, and Indigenous researchers, who often have a deeply personal investment in their research. This was described beautifully by the late Dr. Bernice Joseph (Koyukon) of Noolaagh Doh in her dissertation which focused on transforming educational practices for Native students. She asserted that this is a distinguishing factor of all Indigenous peoples' efforts. She described the mental and emotional labors of Indigenous scholars in this way: "The emotional labour emerges from a commitment by many Indigenous scholars to focus on outcomes rather than just theory as a means of liberation for collective purposes."[13] In other words, Indigenous peoples' work, whether planning, researching, or educating, is driven by the desire and need for the collective liberation of Indigenous peoples. The academic work of Indigenous scholars is not often driven by theory, or by other pursuits that are unrelated to the thriving of Indigenous peoples.

To explain the methods behind this research, I must first explain *why* it was necessary for me to take this path in the first place. To omit an accounting of my own mental, emotional, spiritual – and at times physical – labor in pursuit of this work would erase the persistent, ongoing and often detrimental impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples' today. This will be recounted in greater detail in the #realtalk writing at the end of this chapter.

[13] Joseph, "*Indigenous and Western Knowledges: Transforming Educational Practices In Native Alaska,*" 85.

As mentioned in the introduction, prior to this master's program I was engaged in my own personal research to understand the history behind why Uŋalaqłiq no longer sings or dances in our ancestral ways. Responses from members of my community ranged widely from not knowing the history, to sharply rebuking my gall for asking in the first place – even insinuating that I was inviting in bad spirits against the Evangelical Covenant Christian faith that is still practiced today. There is ongoing tension surrounding this topic, for many reasons. Finding consistent information about the history of ancestral practices on our own homelands – and a collective understanding of the era it was put to sleep – was, and is, difficult.

How can that be so? How can a citizenry descended from thousands of years of experience in one region of the world not possess a complete shared understanding of our peoples' history, yet collectively know the narrow history of settlers to our country? How can "explorers", such as Vitus Bering, James Cook and Otto von Kotzebue, be prominently adulated in our school curriculum and geographic place re-names, yet we do not have a consistent understanding of how the songs, dances and other ancestral practices and traditions that kept us strong for thousands of years, ended? How can this history, which has been carefully tucked out of the mainstream Western education system, help to explain the current challenges experienced by Indigenous peoples? How can awakening ancestral practices that have proven to keep our people strong for thousands of years contribute to the healing of the challenges we face today? This knowledge, our shared history, is our birthright. This project, as minor as it may be, is my attempt to recover part of the story to help us to understand our history and think about ways to awaken the good medicine within our sleeping ancestral practices to bring further healing and strength to our people.

Learning that our songs travelled to Ggaał Doh and Noolaagh Doh, I wanted to better understand the connections between the establishment of the mission in of our community and the suppression of our practices. In a post to our Native Village of Unalakleet Facebook group, I recounted when several members of our tribal council and myself travelled to Ggaał Doh to thank them for protecting our Uŋalaqɬiq Mask Dance and songs in October of 2016. One community member was upset with the fact that I had said missionaries had stopped our singing and dancing. According to this person, the missionaries had become part of the community – even learning Iñupiaq to evangelize the Good Word – and that it was the schoolteachers who were to blame for ending our practices. In other communications, I was scolded for spreading misinformation and told that my grandparents would be disappointed in my desire to awaken our songs and dances.

My own readings of the Covenant missionaries' journals had helped me to understand that the missionaries had later transitioned into becoming teachers in the newly established education system in Alaska – they were in fact, one and the same. This interaction pushed me to dig deeper to better understand why this is not common knowledge. Through this research, I sought to identify the connections between the missionaries and the education system and how this colonial partnership led to the suppression of our ancestral practices and contributed to the intergenerational traumas and challenges that we experience today.

So, how does one approach uncovering and documenting history from an Indigenous lens particularly when the majority of that history has been written by the very people who were responsible for stripping away the knowledge in the first place? How does one do so within a system that is, itself, complicit in the degradation of our peoples' knowledge application and transmission? Furthermore, a system that profits by selling back a diluted version of that history to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through tuition and other associated fees? This has been a

question I have wrestled with throughout this entire graduate program. It has taken me much time and reflection to settle on an approach to address the above questions. Though I am still deeply unsatisfied with the chosen approach, I hope that it will contribute to a foundation for further learning.

My approach has been to use an Indigenous paradigm with local culturally responsive methodology so as to be in tune with my community. Everything about this approach has to be relational, or it will not be culturally appropriate or accepted. Māori scholar *Tuhiwai* Linda Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, discusses how the written word – whether crafted by researchers or travelers[14] – has deeply shaped a skewed understanding of the history of Indigenous peoples. It also continues to make it difficult for Indigenous peoples to understand their current context in relation to the true historical events that are often hidden; the written word has been weaponized against us. My hope is to provide another way to understand the challenges that face us by analyzing what has been written and said about us, then reshaping the narrative to comprehend our history from a contemporary Iñupiaq lens.

I draw inspiration from the approach of Shawn Wilson's book, *Research is Ceremony*.[15] According to Wilson, the fundamental understanding at the core of our scholarship, as Indigenous peoples', is our relationality to our family and community and to our lands, but also to all of our ancestors throughout time, past and present. Ultimately, I want to live up to our responsibility to be good relatives by helping to grow a shared understanding of how colonization/assimilation (and the associated traumas) continue to impact us today on an individual and family basis, as well as

[14] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Methodologies,* 8.
[15] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*

how we operate as a community. I want to elevate cultural practices that I feel carry the medicine that we need to heal and to strengthen our communities.

In her dissertation, Gwich'in scholar Dr. *Khaih Zhuu* Charlene Stern of Vashrąįį K'o̧o̧ (Arctic Village) offered these words of her Neets'ąįį ancestors, "The answers that work for the Gwich'in people have always come from the cultural knowledge which has been handed down from one generation to another among ourselves."[16] Indigenous people have, and always will, plan for the present and future of their peoples' in a way that is grounded in place, tradition, culture, kinship, and responsibility to future generations. I seek the healing knowledge of our people.

Recognizing that much of the history I am looking for is tucked within accounts written around the turn of the 19th century – most often from an imperial, Western lens – I used secondary research to pull together a brief history of Uŋalaqɬiq from an Iñupiaq perspective. The aims of this effort were to:

- piece together a high-level historical timeline of the mission in Uŋalaqɬiq and its part in the implementation of an education system;
- examine the importance of ancestral practices, such as the *qargi* and *Kivġiq*, to the health and wellbeing of the community; and
- look into efforts of other Alaska Native communities to awaken their own ancestral traditions and practices.

By connecting the dots between these key topics, I hope to contribute to a shared understanding of the ways that: a) colonization detrimentally impacts Indigenous peoples and b) reclamation of ancestral practices can help to overcome challenges and strengthen wellbeing in

[16] Stern, *"From Camps to Communities: Neets'ąįį Gwich'in planning and development,"* 126.

Indigenous communities. This research will be freely available for use by our community and may be used to build curriculum, engage in dialogue about healing, to bring ancestral traditions back, and to create our own resources to spread this knowledge.

I have chosen to go the route of pulling together and analyzing secondary data in large part because I do not have the time and capacity as a full-time working professional to go through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to conduct surveys or interview community members. That information would provide a more meaningful and in-depth understanding of the true and continued impacts of our community's loss due to colonization and missionization. It would enrich and greatly contribute to our understanding of this shared history and I hope to contribute to these next, critical steps through my work and potentially further education. I hope that this writing contributes to others' efforts to grow this shared knowledge, as well.

Similar to Smith,[17] I chose throughout my research to assert my vantage point as that of a colonized person.[18] I privilege that vantage point as she has in her transformative work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. She asserts – and I agree – that research "is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized."[19] To me, this means that the material I have researched is predominantly transmitted through a deeply problematic colonial lens and I am unabashed in my right to critically analyze the information through my own worldview. Though I do not represent all Indigenous, Alaska Native, or Iñupiaq people, my perspective is inherently centered in these knowledge systems, and I will assert my own thinking in this research.

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[17] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1.
[18] *As a colonized Inuk, I was raised believing I belonged to Western society; yet implicit and explicit biases against my people were pervasive, and the true history of colonization was hidden.*
[19] Ibid, 7.

I chose to take the path of a Master's project rather than a thesis to afford myself the flexibility to document what I am learning along with the mental, emotional, and even spiritual journey it takes as an Indigenous student to power through this bureaucratic system to be of service to our community. Yes, this includes long narratives such as this one. If I were simply to present my findings, it would further contribute to the erasure of the ongoing impacts of colonization and missionization, which is unacceptable to me.

Positionality

I have been inspired by many brilliant Indigenous scholars along this journey, one of whom is Yup'ik scholar Dr. *Panigkaq* Agatha John-Shields of Nunakauyaq (Toksook Bay). In her dissertation for a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree in Applied Linguistics at UAF, she described her positionality as both an insider and outsider with lived experience and expertise within her field. This reflects her dual positionality as a paid professional within the institution and as a member of the Other (which Smith describes as predominantly made up of Indigenous peoples whose worldviews and ways of being were historically situated entirely outside of the Western imperial realm).[20] Dr. John-Shields brings her experience as a Yup'ik person who was blessed to grow up in a traditional way to her role as a minority faculty member teaching predominately white students. Positioning herself as both insider and outsider enabled her to share personal insights with her students that was very valuable in helping them to understand the power dynamics of authority within educational institutions.[21] Such insight is critical particularly for teachers who will go on to teach Native students in Native communities.

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[20] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 2.
[21] John-Shields, *"Tangerqengiaraucaraq (Being Present),"* 64.

I, too, consider my position to be one of both an insider and outsider. My Iñupiaq name (and now legal name) is *Ayyu*, after my *amau* – my grandma's mother. My children, *Kutuukhuq*, *Talialuk*, *Qanigluk*, and *Inuaathluuraq*, are also connected by their names to precious loved ones. Our names connect us to all past and future ancestors throughout time and therefore bind us to our responsibility to contribute to the collective wellbeing of our people and community, regardless of where we live and work. In this way, I am an intimate insider to this research and work.

As a working professional advocating for the inherent right of Indigenous peoples' to perpetuate our ways of being and life, I consider myself an insider to this research. Through our work at First Alaskans Institute, we have the blessing and honor of helping to create healing spaces where Indigenous people may explore Indigenous knowledge systems. Such spaces create opportunities to learn about the untaught history of Alaska and intergenerational trauma. These dialogues also help to demystify the complex history and insidious manifestations of racism from various viewpoints (i.e. internalized, interpersonal, institutional, structural and systemic) while elevating solutions driven by our people and communities. As someone who has helped to create such spaces, I consider myself an insider.

As a graduate student with 23 years of combined experience within the primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions in Alaska – and as a parent of four children at various stages of their public schooling – I am intimately familiar with the ways this system perpetuates a predominately white, Western perspective of histories, sciences, arts, and most other subjects. I am also deeply familiar with the ways in which this system – as much of American society does – mistakenly prides itself on being both neutral and unbiased. In this way, I consider myself both insider and outsider. As for the ways I consider myself an outsider – now we get to the #realtalk.

Embarking upon this research through a graduate program at UAF has meant that I am effectively buying back my peoples' knowledge, mostly transmitted through the eyes and writings of non-Native people who did not truly know or love us. People who had in fact, actively and with great planning and intention, maltreated our humanity with their skewed judgment of Indigenous peoples. Many of these people shared the views of Sheldon Jackson and saw their charge to "uplift the whole population out of barbarism to civilization," as Jackson stated in his Education Report to the Department of Interior, Bureau of Education in June of 1890.[22]

Those people did not understand nor value the rich knowledge base our people had of these beautiful lands and waters, or our relationship to them and to one another. Our people had knowledge of how to thrive in beautiful, abundant homelands that others have found to be harsh, unforgiving and desolate. With their narrow perspectives of holiness and enlightenment, these outside people crafted and rolled out a system of education known to many as the "Kill the Indian to Save the Man" assimilation era. This system effectively replaced our systems of knowing and being with narrowly defined versions of the knowledge they deemed important for all people to know.

My grandparents attended the mission schools that were established in our communities. My mother, aunties, uncles and nearly their entire generation were sent away to boarding schools. Whether situated within the community, or in faraway places wholly different from our homelands, the end goal was the same – to strip our Nativeness from us. Our Nativeness, represented by the way we smell, what we eat, the very language we speak, the way we think, our spirituality, our peoples' history, worldview, our ancestral practices and traditions, and even practicing our own medicine. All this was done while simultaneously sowing seeds of disdain for

[22] Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska," 82.

our ways of being and living. Whether unconscious or implicit, whether expressed through loving words and actions or emotional, mental, or physical violence, the message was the same – our traditional ways of life were inferior to their "modern" ways. We were meant to feel lucky that they came to bring a superior way. *Saankalaxt'* Ernestine Hayes (Tlingit) of Dzánti K'ihéeni (Juneau area) said it brilliantly in her book, *The Tao of Raven*: "After all, Indian education isn't designed to teach Native children to be white. Indian education is designed to teach Native children to want to be white."[23]

Generations later, I feel just how highly effective these efforts were. I feel it like a cut every time I am told how articulate I am [for a Native girl.] I feel it each time I am asked about an ancestral tradition or practice I am unfamiliar with or to translate something from English to Iñupiatun. I feel it each time I see how Western standards of success are held up as the measure we must strive for but can never truly attain. Personally, I feel this era is complicit in every single suicide in our communities – the most heartbreaking symptom of feeling that we do not belong to a world that does not truly value us. I spoke of my experiences on this topic in the *Coffee and Quaq* podcast created by young Iñupiaq leader, *Qannik* Alice Glenn of Utqiaġvik, which centers on Decolonization.[24]

I feel just how effective colonization has been as I grasp for answers to the challenges facing us while also wrestling with a deep sense of insecurity about getting it all wrong or being rejected or shunned by my own community. I feel it as I brace myself for the lateral violence that comes when hurt people hurt others in the void of understanding where our pain comes from. I

[23] Hayes, *The Tao of Raven*: *An Alaska Native Memoir*, 56.
[24] Coffee & Quaq podcast, "Decolonization."

also feel it when I am diving deep into books written by researchers who have made careers and a name for themselves by studying my people – extracting and documenting our knowledge from their narrow perspective for personal gain and fame, while our collective knowledge was effectively being put to sleep. I feel it when I am wrestling with internalized insecurity about the knowledge I yearn for, while grappling with the rage and grief of truly egregious injustices our people have faced, knowing that they are carefully hidden behind the veil of systematic erasure of our true history.

The pain and hurt our families have experienced continue to be shrouded in the darkness of questioning *why is this happening to us*? It hurts knowing that our good medicine lies within the awakening of the knowledge and practices that have kept us whole, and that healing is what is needed in order to access it. It is overwhelming to comprehend that the reopening of a festering wound is necessary to clean it out and apply the good medicine that has proven to be effective. The effectiveness of our medicine is proven by our very existence over thousands of years in these beautiful homelands which has required our strength, perpetual adaptation, brilliant resourcefulness, and deep love, care and responsibility for one another.

I have wrestled with knowing that our tradition of transmitting knowledge orally through the generations was far superior to the system of tucking knowledge into books only accessible to those who can read English and know where to find the information. Throughout this program, I have struggled with the knowledge that we are paying the same oppressive system that was used to strip our knowledge from us, and that I am required to both learn and use the Western academic language that was weaponized against us to try to bring a fuller understanding of this history.

To have encountered the true, painful history that has been hidden from you and most of society while reckoning within yourself for every personal harm you and your family have

experienced as a result of miseducation and intergenerational trauma – oh, the irony, rage, and grief that has abounded. Sugpiaq scholar Leilani Sabzalian from Cirniq (Chignik) captured it brilliantly on Twitter in a tweet on September 17, 2018:

[25]

I will never experience the fullness of our rich knowledge that is my birthright. A birthright that has been stolen from me and from generations of Alaska Native people including my own children. This knowledge, which is encoded within our Indigenous languages and born from and shaped by these lands and our rich history upon them, is irreplaceable. Such a deep understanding of this place cannot be found anywhere else and yet is systematically being painted over with English, which is truly, the poorest substitute. We have become situated as outsiders to our own knowledge systems while others profit and make careers of their supposed "expertise" in it.

My mother, *Sitaktun Qutquq,* was taken away from our community to attend boarding school at Mt. Edgecumbe in Sheet'ká (Sitka), as many others were, and became adapted to Western living outside of the village. A brilliant woman, she became very adept at navigating the non-Native world. My mother applied her sharp intellect to advocate on behalf of our peoples' rights as a Tribal Advocate for much of her career. Never one to boast or seek spotlight, she

[25] Sabzalian, "White academics." @leilanisabz

resolutely remained in the background, supporting and facilitating many important efforts to resist the ever-present threat against our Indigenous rights. As we are all responsible to do, she applied her gifts to the protection and strength of our community, and she did it from outside of our homelands – a situation I find myself in, as well. Though I yearn to live at home in Uŋalaqɬiq and raise my children on the lands that have sustained us for countless generations, I know that the work I am currently doing allows me to contribute far more to my community through our systemic statewide efforts than I could living there. In this way, I am an outsider to my community, which is something I feel both deeply sad and insecure about. For now, like my mother, I find ways to contribute to home from afar.

The late Yup'ik elder *Paniguaq* Peter Jacobs of Mamterilleq (Bethel) used to say, "Our whole lives we were taught lies about who we are and where we come from. As an elder, I am only now waking up to see these were lies. As we are waking up, our children are waking up, too. They are waking up hungry. *What are we going to feed them*?" I believe that we are born into the time that we are because our gifts are necessary in this generation and contribute to the longer arc of our peoples' history on our lands. This knowledge, and the strength of my name which connects me to all of my ancestors throughout time, has sustained me in this journey to understand our history. It has helped me to overcome insecurity over knowledge that was taken from us, and to let go of the hurt and embarrassment that stems from not knowing. I know now that the shame of that lack of knowledge belongs to those who took it from us. By doing my own small part, I hope to help others coming up with and after me to take this work further – back to who we really are.

The love and strength of my people protects me. I use ceremony and prayer to release the tension and hurt that I have encountered in my research. I have adopted the Tlingit practice of walking into the water to build strength and to invite the ocean's help in lifting the burdens we

carry as Indigenous peoples trying to live and thrive in societies not constructed for our success. This has been healing and transformational. Learning and applying medicinal knowledge of *ayyu* (also known as Labrador or tundra tea) has deepened my appreciation for this powerful plant, and the responsibility I carry as an *atiq* (carrying the same name) to its role in our wellbeing. A Yup'ik elder once told me that those carrying the name of *ayuq* (Yup'ik) or *ayyu* (Iñupiaq) are known as the ones who spiritually cleanse. Growing into this responsibility is something I treasure, and will endeavor towards throughout the rest of my life.

Ahtna elder, Wilson Justin of Nahbaesna' / Naabah Niign (Nabesna), once said, "The English language, by its very nature, is regressive. It acquires, then breaks things down into smaller and smaller parts. Our Indigenous languages are relational: we connect everything to the collective whole throughout time. By our very languages, we are moving in opposite directions."[26] In the education system as it currently stands, Indigenous peoples are both insiders and outsiders. It has not always been so, and untangling that history in order to understand the complex nature of the challenges that face us today is one small part of what I endeavor to contribute to through this research.

[26] Wilson Justin, personal conversation with author and UAA Ph.D students, March 25, 2019.

They were real old when we were kids, you know. If [the inuksuk] had meaning, they don't really pass that on much… We were already in school at that time, and we were more interested in schoolwork than our own history.

– Talialuk Stanton Katchatag, Iñupiaq from Uŋalaqliq
"Stone markers are treasures of the Arctic landscape"
Anchorage Daily News article, July 16, 2006

Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place – indeed how we/they came to *be a place.*

– Eve Tuck (Unangax̂ of Tanax̂ Amix̂, St. Paul Island) and K. Wayne Yang
Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor

Historical Overview

The missionization of Alaska Natives and the ensuing suppression of our ancestral traditions occurred all across Alaska. Our communities have been wrestling with the question of how to hold onto, and strengthen, traditional knowledge and ways of life ever since. As other Indigenous communities similarly experienced, colonization and missionization tended to go hand in hand as colonizing countries spread across the globe. In the late 1800's, Uŋalaqɬiq was missionized by the Evangelical Covenant Church. Predictably, the combination of cultural conflict and power imbalances led to the destruction or elimination of many indigenous traditions, which was certainly the case in Uŋalaqɬiq.

For the broader Iñupiat community, which Uŋalaqɬiq is a part of, this loss is linked with the ending of the *qargi* – community houses which served as the political, social, ceremonial, and education institutions for our people. Such houses served as a center of deliberation and decision-making as well as an important place of learning, celebration and belonging.[27] In Uŋalaqɬiq, the *qargi* would have been where ceremonial feasts, such as the *Kivġiq* (the Messenger Feast), were held. Together, the *qargi* and the *Kivġiq* provided communities such as Uŋalaqɬiq with a means of transmitting intergenerational knowledge, deliberating, decision-making, as well as serving as a source of strong identity and wellness. As the missionaries discouraged – or relentlessly pursued the ending of – the use of *qargi* and ceremonial feasts such as *Kivġiq*, they cut off both the place and the means of the intergenerational transmission of our traditions and knowledge, while effectively planting seeds of shame about our own people and ways. This effectively led to the loss

[27] MacLean, "Revitalization of the Qargi, the Traditional Community House, as an Educational Unit of the Inupiat Community," 131.

of the very medicine that binds and repairs the community and ensures the wellbeing of both individuals and the community as a whole.

In fulfillment for his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Minnesota in the late 1960s, researcher Thomas Correll noted that the last two *qargi* of Uŋalaqɬiq[28]were no longer used by around 1940, and that informants for his research suggested that the Evangelical Covenant Church had supplanted the *qargi* as the locus of Iñupiaq expression[29] and goes on to describe the various forms of speech that would exist within the *qargi* (such as *unipqaaq:* the genre of storytelling, *mitaaqtuujuq*: the genre of joking, and *qilavuq*: the genre of incantation) to impart knowledge, history and traditions; knowledge that is no longer taught.

Kivġiq is a centuries-old tradition that connects Inuit communities across the circumpolar north of Alaska and Canada, including Yup'ik peoples to the south of Iñupiaq country. This tradition, revitalized and still practiced in some communities, is no longer celebrated in Uŋalaqɬiq. According to oral history, and corroborated by Evangelical Covenant Church publications, the last time Uŋalaqɬiq celebrated *Kivġiq* or any other traditional feast was on or around 1915, due to Covenant Church efforts to extinguish this ancient annual practice.[30]

In her research paper titled, "Iñupiaq pride: *Kivġiq* (Messenger Feast) on the Alaskan North Slope" researcher Hiroko Ikuta offered the following Utqiaġvik, Alaska-based story to explain the origin of the Messenger Feast.

> Long ago, Eagle Mother found out that humans were lonely because they did not know how to sing and dance. To remedy this situation, she instructed her son to kidnap a young hunter in order to teach him how to construct a large qargi (men's/community house), a qilaun (round drum), and a kalukaq (box drum). Eagle Mother then showed the hunter how to drum, sing, and dance. Kalukaq is often used to refer to the dance(s) accompanied by the playing

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[28] *In his writing, Correll refered to our qargi as qasgi(s). For the sake of clarity, it is spelled consistently as qargi throughout this paper in alignment with our Iñupiaq spelling.*
[29] Correll, *"Ungalaqlingmiut: A Study in Language and Society."* 197
[30] Ibid, 204

> of the box drum. Eagle Mother also told the hunter to prepare a Kivġiq (Messenger Feast) in order to host his guests. In those days, there were not many people living near the young hunter, so the first guests of the Kivġiq were non-human persons sent by Eagle Mother who had transformed them from various animals into people. After the feast was over, Eagle Mother was happy and became young again.[31]

Over time, *Kivġiq* became an important time to redistribute resources from the lands and waters, strengthen bonds between communities, promote pride in identity and build shared knowledge of history and tradition through song and dance. Additionally, because it was held during the darkest days of our long winter, it provided a space for rejuvenation, connection and much needed celebration, all of which could serve as good medicine for the challenges faced by Uŋalaqłiq today.

Missionization

To tell the history of missionization in Alaska, one must become familiar with the work of Sheldon Jackson, who prior to his work in Alaska served as a missionary-at-large in the Rockies in the 1870's. Around 1875, he became interested in the "plight" of Alaska Native peoples, and within two years arrived on the shores of K̲aachx̲aana.áak'w (Wrangell) in Southeast Alaska, where he established a Presbyterian mission with Mrs. A.R. McFarland.[32]

Over the course of six short years, Jackson had given no less than nine hundred talks to the United States Congress on the immense potential of Alaska, and of America's gross neglect of its Indigenous peoples' and their education. In May of 1884, Congress established the civil government of the Alaskan territory, appropriating $25,000 for the education of its citizens under the Organic Act of 1884. The following year, President Grover Cleveland appointed Jackson the

[31] Ikuta, "Inupiaq Pride: *Kivġiq* (Messenger Feast) on the Alaskan North Slope." 346-7.
[32] Olsson, "By One Spirit," 411.

General Agent of Education for Alaska, charged with dispensing the funds in support of establishing a school system.[33]

After Jackson's appointment, Christianization efforts toward Alaska Native peoples, including the Arctic Iñupiat, quickly gained traction.[34] He epitomized the view that teachers and missionaries were charged with uplifting Natives out of barbarism into civilization – as James VanStone put it: "True conversion meant nothing less than a virtually total transformation of native existence."[35]

Following his appointment, and similar efforts in the Lower 48 states, Jackson convened a very small group of Protestant-based leaders representing the Methodists, Episcopalians and Baptists denominations to divide the territory of Alaska into separate sections for the five main Protestant denominations to carry out their mission work with a united front. The product of this meeting was the Comity Agreement, or the Jackson Polity for Alaska, which effectively created agreed upon boundaries for individual denominations to evangelize within.[36]

> It was a small affair in outward appearance – only three secretaries and Sheldon Jackson – just enough to sit around a table; but this little company, meeting in an upper room, was sufficient to inaugurate a policy of peace, that, if adopted on a larger scale, would work for the benefit of all Christendom. And now I see these four heads bending over the little table, on which Sheldon Jackson has spread out a map of Alaska… The allotment was made in perfect harmony. As the Presbyterians had been the first to enter Southeastern Alaska, they all agreed that they should retain it, untroubled by any intrusion. By the same rule, the Episcopalians were to keep the valley of the Yukon, where the Church of England [Anglican] following in the track of the Hudson Bay Company, had planted its missions forty years before. The island of Kodiak, with the adjoining region of Cook's Inlet, made a generous portion for the Baptists Brethren; while to the Methodists were assigned the Aleutian and Shumagin islands. The Moravians were to pitch their tents in the interior – in the valleys of the Kusko Kwim and the Nushagak; while the Congregationalists mounted higher to the Cape Prince of Wales, on the American

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[33] Ibid, 411.
[34] Burch, "The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska," 82.
[35] VanStone, "Alaska Natives and the White man's religion," 175-179.
[36] Williams, "The Comity Agreement: Missionization of Alaska Native People," 152-153.

> side of Bering Strait; and, last of all, as nobody else could take it, the Presbyterians went to Point Barrow.[37]

While the Evangelical Covenant Church was not participant to this specific meeting, Uŋalaqłiq was in the Norton Sound area that had not been assigned a denomination, so was given permission at a later time to carry out their mission work there, outlined below.[38]

In 1887 Axel E. Karlson and Adolph Lydell, Swedish Evangelical Covenant Church missionaries, landed on the shores of Alaska and travelled northwest and southeast, respectively, eventually settling to establish missions in Uŋalaqłiq and Yaakwdáat (Yakutat).

Upon Karlson's initial arrival to the Norton Sound Yup'ik village of Taciq (St. Michael) he spoke only Swedish and Russian languages. There, according to Fred Savok in *Jesus and the Eskimo*, he was approached by *Nashalook* (traditional chief of Uŋalaqłiq) and a Russian immigrant named Sergei Ivanoff[39] and invited to Uŋalaqłiq. According to Savok, *Nashalook* had received direction from the Lord in a dream to travel to Taciq to "find a man with a book" and bring him back "because he has something to tell you."[40]

In *Ticasuk* Emily Ivanoff Brown's account of this initial meeting in *The Roots of Ticasuk*, their family's history indicated that it was in fact Sergei (Ivanoff Brown's grandfather) who advised Karlson to build his mission in Uŋalaqłiq, presenting his son Stephan as an aid to his efforts as interpreter who spoke both Russian and Yup'ik fluently, an offer accepted gratefully.[41]

By Ivanoff Brown's account, with the help of Stephan's interpretation while in Taciq, Karlson met with *Delialuk* (noted as chief) and his brothers, *Maktak, Taktuk, Paniptchuk* and

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[37] Ibid, 153.
[38] Burch, 82.
[39] *In Savok's account, Sergei's last name was spelled Ivanov – to conform to current spelling in my community it will be noted as Ivanoff in this paper.*
[40] "Three Swedes on a Mission: The Beginnings of Christian Radio in Russia," 18.
[41] Ivanoff Brown, *The Roots of Ticasuk*, 96.

Nashalook, all of whom gave him permission to return to Uŋalaqłiq to settle and preach the gospel, which he accepted.[42]

According to the account of these early days by Christian Radio for Russia in "Three Swedes on a Mission: The Beginnings of Christian Radio in Russia," throughout the first three months of Karlson's time in Uŋalaqłiq, his life was often threatened, forcing him to live under *Nashalook*'s protection until he established himself in the community while growing a strong relationship with Stephan as his interpreter.[43]

The following fall, in 1888, Karlson saved the life of an Iñupiaq boy named *Uyaraq* (also known as "Rock") whose father had been murdered. *Uyaraq* soon learned English and after assisting Karlson as both a dogsled-driver and interpreter, became the first convert to the faith. It would be several more years before others would be converted to Christianity, in part due to the charismatic preaching of *Uyaraq*, who came to be known as the "Paul of the Eskimos"[44,45]According to one such early convert, *Etageak*, said no one wanted to listen to Karlson in the beginning, since they "cared only for our own gatherings, plays, and feasts."[46]

Of these early days in Uŋalaqłiq, the church publication on their mission work in Alaska, *Covenant Frontiers* notes:

> Karlson came to a people whose homes hearts and minds were benighted. They lived in gloomy igloos. Of the true God, their Maker, they knew nothing, neither did they understand much about the value of riches that his bountiful hand so freely had scattered around them. They had no schools; they could neither read nor write. Savage customs and superstitions prevailed among them and so called medicine men ruled over most of them… Through the generosity of white men – whalers and others – the Eskimos had learned to like and to make intoxicating liquor.[47]

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[42] Ibid, 98.
[43] "Three Swedes on a Mission,"18.
[44] Burch, 83.
[45] "Three Swedes on a Mission," 19.
[46] Almquist, *Covenant Missions in Alaska*, 20.
[47] Covenant Frontiers, 193.

On October 22, 1889, Karlson gathered the children of Uŋalaqɬiq into the newly built home of himself and the Reverend August Anderson to begin their school. On that first day, twenty-nine children attended: 20 boys and 9 girls. Of this day, Karlson wrote, "The children all got new names and some clean clothes and promised to wash their faces every morning."[48]

Around this same time, following the U.S. Navy Commander Charles H. Stockton's travels to Northern Alaska, he reported the "sad state of Natives living there" and urged Sheldon Jackson and the Episcopal Church to "do something about it," prompting Jackson to seek volunteers for newly established, government-sponsored school system staffed by missionaries.[49]

By his own account in a report to the United States Office of Education, Jackson reported that his advertisement, making a call for volunteers to go to the "barbarous Eskimo of Arctic Alaska" resulted in a ship full of them heading north to Utqiaġvik (Barrow) and Kiŋigin (Wales) within less than three months.[50] Further, in this same report, Jackson quotes the Alaskan Territorial Board of Education recommendation, noting:

> Whereas it is the invariable experience of all who have been engaged or interested for years in the difficult task of attempting to educate and civilize the natives and creoles of Alaska that the greatest obstacles to success are, first, the want of adequate means of securing the regular and general attendance of the children of these people at the various government schools and, second, the stolid indifference, superstition, and fear of change on the part of the greater number of the parents of such children; and… Whereas, the Government of the United States is annually appropriating large sums of money for the purpose of educating and civilizing these people and employing competent and zealous teachers for that purpose, who are making great sacrifices by enduring severe privations, general discomfort, and personal isolation among an alien and barbarous race of people…[51]

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[48] Ibid, 194.
[49] Burch, 82.
[50] Ray, *The Eskimos of Bering Strait*, 214.
[51] Jackson, *The Work of the Bureau of Education for the Natives of Alaska,* 763.

Jackson went on to request that the governor of the District of Alaska, Hon. Lyman E. Knapp, take up and approve their recommendation to ensure the compulsory education of natives and creoles in Alaska, compelling their regular attendance at schools already established or thereafter provided – a request later granted.[52]

Meanwhile, in Uŋalaqłiq, upon more missionaries' arriving in 1891 and government funding coming in, Karlson built a Children's Home (also called the Mission Home) to continue and deepen their evangelism, and called Miss Hanna C. Swenson to Uŋalaqłiq to become its first matron, and later his wife.[53]

Around the turn of the century, between 1898-1900, the gold strike in Sitŋasuaq was in full swing, which lured many missionaries – including Karlson and others serving in Uŋalaqłiq – into staking their own claims[54] – a fact that caused considerable bitterness in Uŋalaqłiq.[55] According to the *Covenant Frontiers* publication, Karlson used some of his own and others' riches from gold to build the church in Uŋalaqłiq in 1901.[56] There he remained missionizing until his death in January of 1910.

The next missionary to be called to Uŋalaqłiq following Karlson's passing was Reverend Henning Gustafson with his wife Hilma, who arrived later that same year. When they arrived, the number of Native children living in the Children's Home numbered five, and gradually dwindled to zero over the course of their mission work there. By their account, "The natives had learned by that time to take fairly good care of the children in their own homes."[57]

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[52] Ibid, 763.
[53] Covenant Frontiers, 195.
[54] Covenant Frontiers, 197.
[55] Burch, 83.
[56] Covenant Frontiers, 197.
[57] Ibid, 202

Around this same period of time, in alignment with his vision to "uplift the whole population out of barbarism into civilization,"[58] Jackson, in lock-step with the establishment of Mission schools, decided to import domesticated reindeer from Siberia in an attempt to provide "a change from the condition of hunters to that of herders… a long step upward in the scale of civilization," because as he saw it, "While we offer them the Gospel with one hand, we must offer them food with the other."[59]

Owning reindeer was one practical step in the direction of his fervor to "convert the Eskimo to Christianity" since, as Dorothy Jean Ray put it in her tome, *The Eskimos of Bering Strait, 1650-1898*, Jackson saw our people, not as ones "with an Integrated and workable culture, but as Barbarians, savages, or an impoverished and almost extinct race, which held distinct promise, however, of quickly learning new ways. He looked upon Eskimo living conditions as being toward the bottom of the scale of human existence."[60] Jackson's grand plan to domesticate our hunters is an area that certainly deserves deeper research from an Indigenous lens – here, I offer it as an important sidenote in the bigger picture of colonization through missionization.

It was during the Gustafsons' mission tenure in Uŋalaqłiq from 1910-1916 that the last recorded ancestral ceremonial feasts were held in our home community. According to Ray, who in her considerable time spent researching in Uŋalaqłiq in the 1960's, met Shafter Toshavik, who had been orphaned in Taciq and was the messenger boy for the last "Inviting-in" feast held there for the people of Uŋalaqłiq in 1912.[61] In their reports, the Gustafson's happily reported back to the

[58] Jackson, 1260.
[59] Ray, *The Eskimos of Bering Strait,* 206.
[60] Ray, *The Eskimos of Bering Strait,* 206.
[61] Ibid, xvi

Covenant Church their success in ending the dances and feasts of Uŋalaqɬiq[62], as noted in the Covenant Frontiers publication of 1941:

> 'Evil dies hard' is an old saying, and the Alaska missionaries have found it so. One of the old evils that repeatedly threatened to ruin the work of the missionaries was the Eskimo feast and dances with all that went with them. In 1915, Gustafson could report that, for the first time in their history, the Unalakleet natives had not held their yearly big feast and dance, though a few had danced a little to 'husbehov.' Gustafson had worked hard to make the natives understand that those dances and feasts brought much evil with them.[63]

Reflection: Missionization + Education

At this point in my research, I reflect on the things that were happening in our community throughout these vast and immense changes to our ways of life during a relatively short period of time. I wonder about *Ayyu*, my grandmother's mother, Edna Eakon (née Koutchak, Atchak) who was born in 1895, right during this swiftly changing time. Orphaned by the 1918 flu outside of Taciq, she attended school in the Uŋalaqɬiq Children's Home until 3rd grade, swept into the group of children enveloped in their evangelization efforts. I wonder what the parents of our community made of the entirely foreign worldviews that were being taught to their children as truth and holiness, oppositional to our own ways of living and being.

Seriously, outsiders coming into someone else's community and homes, speaking an entirely different language and wholly unprepared for the ways of life in their climate and environment, yet evangelizing to their children, giving them new names and replacing their systems of knowledge and identity stemming from a deep connection to homelands, ancestors and traditions? Can you imagine? The absolute arrogance blows my mind.

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[62] *Covenant Frontiers*, 202.
[63] Ibid, 202.

The establishment of an education system, in the beginning staffed by missionaries and paid for by the government to wholly replace our own knowledge and ways of life, set in motion the perpetuation of its original goal – to Kill the Indian to Save the Man. In later years –through the 1970s, our people were taken from our communities and sent to boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), private churches or later, the government of Alaska.

As noted in the report written by Diane Hirshberg and Suzanne Sharp in 2005, entitled "Thirty Years Later: The Long-Term Effect of Boarding Schools on Alaska Natives and Their Communities," while some Alaska Native people who went to boarding school felt they had positive experiences, such as developing good relationships with school personnel, a structured learning environment, and learning about life outside of the village – yet even these positive experiences came at a cost. For many, that detrimental cost came in the form of sexual and physical abuse, the loss of our Native language (as most were forbidden to speak it) which includes the knowledge encoded within it – and harder to quantify, but critical to mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing: loss of culture and identity.[64]

> Those we interviewed told of finding it difficult to return home and be accepted. They felt that by being sent to boarding school they had missed out on learning important traditional skills and had a harder time raising their own children. For communities, the loss of children to boarding schools created a tremendous void, one that interviewees said was filled by alcohol and a breakdown in society. Drugs, alcohol, and suicide are some of the effects interviewees spoke of as coming from boarding home experiences and the loss of cultural identity and family.[65]

I recall a heartbreaking story told by *Narat* Nelson Angapak (Yup'ik from Tuntutuliaq) and recounted in the October/November 2013 edition of the First Alaskans Magazine:

> I didn't speak much English. My teacher called my name and I stood up and he started talking to me in English. I looked at a young man sitting next to me and in

[64] Hirschberg and Sharp, "Thirty Years Later: The Long-Term Effect of Boarding Schools on Alaska Natives and their Communities," 5.
[65] Ibid, 5.

> Yup'ik I said, 'Tell me what the teacher said.' The teacher was really upset and hit my hand with a ruler so hard it split my skin.'
>
> Angapak traces a still-present scar across the knuckles of his left hand. Traumatized, he decided then and there that he would quit school when he was 16, and mustered the courage to tell his grandfather. The day that I told him we had a quiet moment. He was silent and then his response was, 'I was hoping that you would learn enough of this tongue to tell these people that we are people, people with feelings.'
>
> Angapak anguished over his grandfather's words. 'When the school year started that fall I stepped into the classroom knowing that I would stay in school as long as I could, go as far as I could, or until I got kicked out of school because I was too old,' he says. 'If my grandfather had responded any other way I wouldn't be here talking to you.'[66]

The degradation of our knowledge through a system that diminished our sense of self and humanity – and Alaskans' lack of knowledge about this part of our state's sordid history – is a travesty. That so many of our people have been – and continue to be – subjected to curriculum that omits these truths and misrepresents itself as inclusive (leaving us to feel invisible, wondering where the challenges we face come from – or worse, feeling like they represent a dysfunction within us or our community) – is enraging.

That Sheldon Jackson and the missionaries of that time are to this day painted in an altruistic and benevolent light, while uncovering ways they truly saw and thought about us makes my skin crawl. My grandparents, born in 1917 and 1923, respectively, were devout Christians throughout their entire lives. They believed deeply in the power of prayer and His saving grace. I do not contend that they – or other Christian Natives – are wrong in their faith, but to read actual records of Christian missionaries' utter disdain for our ancestral practices, deep knowledge, and ways of living makes me deeply angry.

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[66] Buchanan, "Getting It Done," 38.

One might ask, how is it that so many in our community converted to Christianity in such a short period of time? These are questions have been taken up by many white scholars of the past and bear deeper digging than this paper will. Burch, in his analysis, felt that there were two major factors leading to the near complete conversion of the entire Iñupiat community within a generation: timing and world view.[67]

Regarding timing, the Iñupiat population was greatly impacted and reduced in number by several critical issues– American whalers had drastically reduced the number of bowhead whale and walrus populations, the caribou population was nearly exterminated and the introduction of epidemic diseases had dramatically reduced our numbers. In his opinion, Burch felt that the missionaries had come to a people whose own belief systems had failed to protect them, and were therefore willing to consider different belief systems than previously.[68]

According to Burch, this was likely one major way that *Uyaraq* powerfully evangelized to our fellow Iñupiat, leading to the conversion of masses as he traveled northward in the Qikiqtaġruk (Kotzebue) region with missionaries of the Friends (Quakers) Church. As no other white missionary was able to convincingly, *Uyaraq* deliberately broke powerful taboos in the presence of other Iñupiat without any ill consequences, a demonstration that greatly impacted those witness to it. His most effective approach was to ridicule shamans while breaking taboos and holding up the Bible, proclaiming its' protection – an act that undermined both the shamans' power and also cast doubt on Iñupiat belief systems.[69]

The other factor leading to increased conversion, according to Burch, was related to worldview. In his contention, a simplified explanation is that the Iñupiat worldview was oriented

[67] Burch, 87.
[68] Burch, 87.
[69] Burch, 88.

nonexclusively – able to carry more than one belief concurrently – as opposed to Christianity, which is an exclusive religion. He believed that *Uyaraq* and other missionaries were able to effectively use Christianity to describe and explain many of the experiences of the Iñupiat – therefore not necessarily negating their beliefs – while also imposing a different set of moralistic guides that Burch contends our people of the time simply did not comprehend, believing that taking on Christian beliefs was in addition to our own.[70]

White scholar Thomas Correll, in his doctoral research within Uŋalaqłiq, also questioned the high rate of conversion, and turned his question to community members in the 1960's during his time there. Stephen Katchatag relayed a conversation with his mother when he was between 18-20 years old in the following way:

> 'Mommie, before you were a Christian, how is it that the 'laws' were so closely related – those of the Inupiat and those of the Christians? In the Bible it says: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal. Before the white man even came, the Inupiat laws were pretty close.'
>
> Her response, 'Son, from the time you were two, since you were a boy, your duty of living was different than that of a girl. We taught you to do your work: chop wood, get caribou for mama, or getting seal for your children. I have responsibility, and your daddy, to lead you from your childhood. If I am dead and your daddy, we want you to remember us and the right way we teach you.
>
> We teach you not to steal from your neighbor. Don't look for other ladies when you have one or two children with your wife. That way in your lifetime things wouldn't be too easy to go through. But if you have these memories, every problem of your life would be easier to go through. When I first heard the missionaries, the commandments were pretty close to Inupiat laws a long time ago.' [71]

It seems clear to me that we had a very different understanding of what was being proposed and later imposed – it seems that our people did not see conflict between our own ways of living and being and the new ways of Christianity, that they were in fact, harmonious and

[70] Ibid, 89.
[71] Correll, "Ungalaqlingmiut," 203.

complementary. The fact that this is clearly not the sentiment of those who came into our communities to missionize is a source of tremendous heartache for me. To imagine that our people believed Christianity only amplified our own beliefs, then later were led to feel that our ways were inferior and wrong to detrimental effect in our sense of self, hurts deeply.

Even the leadership of the territory, A.P. Swineford, in his annual report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1885 stated:

> The native Alaskans as a rule, are industrious and provident, living in permanent and substantial homes, and all are self-sustaining… They are far superior intellectually, if not in physical development, to the Indian of the plains; are industrious, more or less skillful workers in woods and metals; and that they are shrewd, sharp traders, all who have had dealings with them will, I think, be willing to testify. They yield readily to civilizing influences and can, with much less care than has been bestowed upon native tribes elsewhere, be educated up to the standard of good and intelligent citizenship.[72]

To draw these connections between the pervasive lack of care for our humanity for generations to the internalized lack of self-worth and value I myself have felt and have observed and felt in my mother, other family and community members makes me want to scream.

The direct connection of the challenges we experience, collectively, as a Native community are tied to these roots of colonization and missionization. One important solution is to ensure that the history taught throughout Alaskan schools includes these painful truths. To not do so is gross neglect for the formation of an informed citizenry – Native and non-Native alike.

Questions of how to ensure the education of our children better reflects the true history of these lands we all call home have been raised for decades. In his Mayor's Address on Education in 1975, North Slope Borough Mayor and Iñupiaq leader *Nanauq* Eben Hopson addressed this very issue:

> Our culture has enabled us to survive and flourish for thousands of years in the Arctic where no other man or culture could… For thousands of years, our

[72] Jackson, *The work of the Bureau of Education for the Natives of Alaska*, 10.

> traditional method of socializing our youth was the responsibility of the family and community. From the first, visitors to the Arctic have universally commented on the warm disposition of our children…
>
> For 87 years the Bureau of Indian Affairs tried to destroy our culture through the education of our children. Those who would destroy our culture did not succeed. Recently, I heard a member of the school personnel say that many of our Iñupiaq children have poor self-concepts. Is it any wonder, when the school systems fail to provide the Iñupiaq student with experiences which would build positive self-concepts when the Iñupiat language and culture are almost totally excluded?
>
> My children and yours spend many hours in school each day, 180 days each year for 12 years. We must have teachers who will reflect and transmit our ideals and values. We must have Iñupiaq-centered orientation in all areas of instruction. I do not want my children to learn that we were "discovered" by Columbus or Vitus Bering. I do not want to hear that we were barbaric or uncivilized. I do not want our children to feel inferior because their language and culture are different from those of their teacher. I do not want to see school planning surveys which list hunting, fishing, whaling or trapping as social or recreational activities.[73]

Nanauq goes on to describe the ways teachers can, and must, integrate into our communities and value our ways of life in order to be considered fit teachers for our children.

Some assert that Native peoples should be thankful that missionaries brought modernity. This condescending view does not account for the thousands of years of our thrival through adaptation over time – it is the height of modernity at all times to continuously adapt to the changing physical and political climate, and our communities have always done so. In her book, Dorothy Jean Ray shared that the observations of Russian and European traders was such,

> The firsthand observations showed that the Eskimos had adapted themselves technically and psychologically to the limitations of man and the universe. They were not experimenting with a means to exist in the Arctic – that day was apparently long past – but were living in a well-developed culture where life was far above a mere existence level and was filled with the luxury of the arts, songs, and dancing. That does not mean they were unreceptive to new objects for making life easier or more enjoyable, but they were conservative, and content enough with

[73] Hopson, Mayor's Address on Education, 1975.

> their ways so that many of their customs continued unchanged until the latter part of the nineteenth century.[74]

In her writing, "Tension of 'Two Worlds': Tradition and Modernity," Vivienne Rontziokos calls attention to the dichotomous relationship between 'traditional' and 'modern' that is forced upon indigenous peoples through a Western, colonial-based lens. Rontziokos frames this dichotomy as a construct of binary opposites: traditional (presented as static and ahistorical with reductionist classifications of inferiority) and modern (enlightened and diametrically opposed to traditional).[75] By this, we understand that the labeling of our lived experience – one of proven adaptation, resourcefulness and flexibility – is not served by the dichotomous labels of traditional and modern. To us, concepts of tradition and modern are not mutually exclusive, and we must reject the rhetoric that forces us to choose.

In a presentation entitled "What Shall We Do With Our Heroes?" given during the State Museum Summer in August of 2017, *Saankalaxt'* Ernestine Hayes of Dzánti K'ihéeni (Juneau) reminded us of another important framing of our history:

> We must always remember that before colonial contact, Native cultures possessed vigorous legal systems, effective educational systems, efficient health systems, elaborate social orders, elegant philosophical and intellectual insights, sophisticated kinship systems, complex languages, profitable trade systems — every social institution needed for a culture to flourish for thousands of years.
>
> We do well to remind ourselves that had the colonial invasion not taken place, Indigenous people would still be living in the twenty-first century. Our lives would still be modern. Paved roads, airports, and electricity would still occur. Some things would be different. We would all be speaking our own languages. Our children would be receiving educations meant to lead to their success. We would not be so vulnerable to incarceration, alcoholism, poverty. We would be healthy. [76]

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[74] Ray, "The Eskimos of Bering Strait, 1650-1898," 87.
[75] Rontziokos, "Tension of 'Two Worlds': Tradition and Modernity," 6.
[76] Hayes, "What Shall We Do With Our Heroes?" May 4, 2018.

We have all been subjected to the same colonial-based education system which neither values nor reflects our contributions to the world, and certainly does not help us to understand our history or contextualize it in a way that helps us to see our present day challenges and opportunities in relation to what has happened on our own homelands.

Though famous writer, feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde famously said "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"[77] when we consider the intergenerational nature of both trauma and healing, I think a more expansive view of education over time can help us to do just that. We are seeing the healing and shifts transpire in real time, and will continue to span across the generations, as is evident by the intergenerational nature of revitalization happening across our homelands. The education system, as a machine set in motion long before our time, continues to wreak detrimental impacts to our communities.

The veil of invisibility about our history, and the ways dichotomous terms such as modern and traditional are weaponized to stifle our progress and wholeness as peoples, must be pierced for us to have clarity about what has happened so we can clearly identify our path forward from here. We, as peoples, must understand the ways that these issues, working in tandem, are part of the mechanisms of colonization that are complicit in the social ills and hurts we experience today. My responsibility, as Uŋalaqłiqmiut, is to learn how to carefully and effectively use the knowledge I have gained through conscious study with and of our people, to help lift that veil for our people.

Where do we go from here? In the next section, we will consider other Iñupiaq community's efforts to reawaken their ancestral singing and dancing and consider other efforts to weave our ancestors' knowledge of healing and ceremony into our contemporary lives.

[77] Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 110.

When our people are fully restored to who we really are, it will be as though we have been through all time; the healing will be that powerful, that complete. That wholeness has always been within us, and will live and breathe through our future generations.

– *Ka.oosh Mike Jackson (Tlingit/Haida from K̲éex̲' / L̲xex'wx̲u.aan [Kake area])*
Circle Peacemaking Training
May 2018

Healing

Qargi

At one time prior to colonial disruption, the *qargi* provided the safe Native space for healing, knowledge transmission and celebration in Uŋalaqɬiq – the primary political, social, ceremonial and educational institution of our community.[78] Often, our men and boys would live within the space, passing down knowledge with the young ones about how to live according to our own belief systems. In the *qargi,* our children experienced rites of passage when they became men and women.[79]

According to his informants, Correll noted that the last two *qargi* of Uŋalaqɬiq were abandoned by around 1940, and later dismantled.[80] According to my grandpa, at one time there were four *qargi* in our community, and they were dismantled by missionaries in a show of dominance and leaving Iñupiaq traditional ways behind. In Correll's opinion, the Covenant Church replaced the *qargi*, though there are many important cultural elements that do not transfer to a Christian setting.[81]

In her remarks to the Alaska Anthropological Association Symposium on "Policy and Planning for Alaskan Languages" in March of 1986, well-known and respected Iñupiaq scholar and leader *Ahgeak* Edna MacLean urged the revitalization of the *qargi* as a necessary step to strengthening the Iñupiaq language and transmission of our knowledge. She encouraged participants to see that the modern-day *qargi* could look very differently than in the past – perhaps a one or multi-room structure, as long as there was space made for Iñupiaq dances,

[78] MacLean, *Revitalization of the Qargi,* 131.
[79] Correll, 217.
[80] Ibid, 204.
[81] Ibid, 217.

competitive games, building of boats and sleds, and community feasts.[82]

Today, there continue to be efforts to revitalize the institution of the *qargi*, including a contemporary nonprofit mirroring the *qargi* in meetings and conferences, and private efforts among women to host "women's houses" in the community.

First Alaskans Institute hosts the annual Statewide Elders and Youth Conference each year preceding the Alaska Federation of Natives Conference – the second-largest and largest convenings of Alaska Native peoples in the state, respectively.

During the Conference, we have built into the agenda times where upwards of 2,000 participants are separated into Mens', Womens' and LGBTQA2S+ Houses to make space to deliberate on the unique challenges facing us, and the strengths and opportunities we have to overcome the challenges faced by Native communities. While the traditional *qargi* structure was not made for this intended purpose, as ever-adapting people in a modern-day context, we are creating intentional time and space for the kind of purposeful deliberations Native peoples have always engaged in. This concept, adapted from the *qargi* is one that FAI applies in our dialogue work throughout the state, nation, and internationally. We have found that our people are hungry for this kind of space, and that it is often a deeply meaningful experience for those who participate. At the urging of conference participants – who many times have stated they would enjoy the entire conference presented in this format – we have even created additional time on the agenda in our pre-conference day to spend time in the Houses.

Some challenges to making these kinds of intentional spaces for men and women include hesitancy to take a leadership role in creating a *qargi* space, which can stem from not knowing

[82] MacLean, *Revitalization of the Qargi,* 131.

how it was done in the past, feeling unsure about how to lead the conversation, or even not wanting to appear unhumble by assuming leadership and drawing attention to oneself.

Recently, a small group of women convened privately to create such a *qargi* space in Qikiqtaġruk following *Kipiġniutit Iñupiuraallanikun*, an Iñupiatun Language Summit. Leading up to the summit, I reached out to a local friend in the community to ask if there would be interest in hosting a *qargi* women's house in her home after the convening ended, which there was. Together, we co-created a Facebook event (invitation copied below) and invited women to her home for a potluck conversation one Saturday afternoon.

The invitation language was simple:

> Qargi – Women's House Gathering
> Saturday, January 26, 2019 at 3 PM – 6 PM
> _____'s House
>
> Our people have always known that creating space for thoughtful deliberation about the challenges and opportunities facing our communities help us to make better, more informed decisions for our future. Traditionally, our Iñupiaq people had qargis (communal houses and gathering places, sometimes just for men's deliberations) for this purpose.
>
> We are taking that concept and making space this Saturday for Native women to share about our unique experiences, talk about what we hope for in our community, and dream about ways we can support one another to help our families and community to be healthy and strong.
>
> We hope you can join us for this small informal gathering (with potluck-style snacks) this Saturday afternoon :)

The time together was led simply by explaining the concept and asking the small group of women to share their thoughts about our experiences as Iñupiaq women, and the vision we share for the future of our community. Though it was only scheduled for 3 hours, the conversation lasted well into the night.

By the end, the women were planning their next *qargi* and thinking through ways to make it a regular practice. Ideas included incorporating a sewing circle aspect (similar to other

communities) to make items to raise funds for causes the women would identify throughout the year. In Uŋalaqɬiq, for example, the Sewing Circle has met weekly for over 100 years, coming together to make handmade items to be auctioned off each year the day after Thanksgiving to benefit elders, widows and children from single or no parent homes.

This experience makes visible the hunger and excitement our people feel engaging in our ancestral practices, and broadly speaks to very real challenges faced within our community when awakening traditions that have not been practiced within this lifetime. The prospect can be daunting, and overcoming insecurities that can arise requires working through those fears, practicing, having grace with one another, and becoming grounded in the practice so that the young ones growing up with this tradition can take it on and strengthen it over their own lifetimes.

Revitalization of Kivġiq and Iñupiat song and dance

To better understand the different paths taken by other communities to reclaim their ancestral practices and potential adaptations that Uŋalaqɬiq may consider, the case studies outlined below explain how two other Alaskan Iñupiaq communities brought their singing, dancing and/or *Kivġiq* back.

Similar to Uŋalaqɬiq, the Iñupiaq communities of Nuurvik (Noorvik) and Utqiaġvik also had their ancestral traditions suppressed by Christian missionaries and other external factors around the turn of the twentieth century. Within the last thirty years, both Nuurvik and Utqiaġvik have successfully awakened some of their ancestral Iñupiaq traditions, following two very different paths. These case studies briefly examine both the history of suppression and awakening of these important practices for these two communities.

Nuurvik

Nuurvik (along the Northwest coast, approximately 42 miles away from Qikiqtaġruk) and Utqiaġvik (the northernmost Iñupiaq community in Alaska) – took very different approaches to bring their ancestral traditions of singing and dancing back.

Though Uŋalaqłiq and Nuurvik were missionized by the Covenant Church and Friends Church, respectively, their manifest destinies were intertwined as noted earlier in this paper with their shared connection to *Uyaraq*, who traveled extensively to nearby villages and as far north as Qikiqtaġruk to evangelize and convert Native families and communities to Christianity. *Uyaraq*, a passionate and charismatic evangelist, upon addressing more than a thousand Iñupiat from across northwestern Alaska during *Qatŋut* – a traditional trade fair held in the Qikiqtaġruk area – inspired the eagerness of the communities in and around Qikiqtaġruk to have a mission established, and asked Sheldon Jackson to make it so. Jackson connected *Uyaraq* and Johnson with Friends missionaries in southeast Alaska to recruit missionaries to travel northward within the next year.[83]

The first Friends Church missionaries to arrive in the Qikiqtaġruk area were Robert and Carrie Samms, and Anna Hunnicutt. *Uyaraq* urged them to settle near Qikiqtaġruk to centralize their ability to reach far within the region. The Samms worked closely with *Uyaraq* to evangelize at the messenger feasts hosted in nearby villages, which extended their reach to communities outside of Qikiqtaġruk, and provided a captive audience for their preaching "against the sins of dancing, drinking, gambling and smoking, and to point the way to salvation to people who otherwise would not have heard their message." [84]

[83] Burch, 85.
[84] Ibid, 85.

Their efforts to suppress these ancestral practices were successful, as the last known messenger feasts were celebrated within the region around the turn of the twentieth century.

In September of 2009, over one hundred years from the last known messenger feast, traditional dancing returned to Nuurvik for the first time. The community, having been identified as the first community to participate in the 2010 United States Decennial Census, recognizing that their small village would soon be thrust into the national spotlight, expressed their desire to include Native dancing as part of their community celebration with visiting census representatives and other officials and guests.[85]

To prepare for this celebration, a thoughtful process was followed to ensure the community was largely in agreement about the path forward, and they felt prepared. Community leaders approached the Nuurvik Friends Church to ask for their blessing, which was bestowed. Church pastor Aurora Sampson shared, "I don't speak for the church, but in my own view we're going to come to a place in the afterlife where we sing and dance to the Lord. While we are on this earth we might as well practice." [86]

Following this blessing, despite the opposition of a few elders, tribal leaders formally approved the proposal to move forward and they asked dancers from The Northern Lights and Qikiqtaġruk Dance Groups to provide intensive lessons over the course of a week, and commissioned a local elder, Clarence Jackson, to quickly apply his carpentry skills to learning how to make drums for the village.[87] On January 25, 2010, with the eyes of the nation upon them, the Iñupiaq community of Nuurvik publicly celebrated their distinct identity as Iñupiat with the return

[85] Barber, "Ban on Native Dancing in Noorvik Overturned"
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

of their dance at the 2010 United States Census kick-off alongside other Iñupiat communities who had come to celebrate with them.

Utqiaġvik (Barrow)

Along the north slope of Alaska, the celebration of *Kivġiq*, which traveled among the eleven north slope villages, had been put to sleep in the early twentieth century, as well, with the last recorded Kivġiq occurring in Wainwright during the winter of 1914-1915.[88] In "Iñupiaq pride: *Kivgiq* (Messenger Feast) on the Alaskan North Slope" Ikuta asserts that the silencing of this particular tradition was due to three main factors: food shortages from bad ice conditions and poor whaling, the flu epidemic of 1918, and pressure from Presbyterian missionaries to "abandon traditional Native beliefs, customs, language, rituals, and ceremonies." [89]

In 1987, North Slope Borough Mayor George Ahmaogak Sr., in consultation with local elders, decided to revive the Kivġiq tradition to help bring about healing by promoting pride in cultural identity and values.[90] To accomplish this, knowing that this tradition hadn't been practiced in over 70 years, the Iñupiat History, Language, Culture Commission of the North Slope Borough was launched to research the history and tradition of *Kivġiq.* This commission traveled extensively throughout the region and spoke with elders and community members to learn about the unique ways each community hosted the *Kivġiq* in order to put together a culminating event that honored all of the traditions while utilizing the resources of today.[91]

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[88] Ikuta, "Iñupiaq pride: *Kivgiq* (Messenger Feast) on the Alaskan North Slope," 347-8.
[89] Ibid, 348.
[90] Ibid, 350.
[91] Ibid, 344.

Three modern solutions for adapting *Kivġiq* for today's society were 1) the decision to host it exclusively in Utqiaġvik as it is the only north slope community with the capacity to host the thousands of attendees that participate from across the circumpolar north, and 2) shifting from sending two messenger runners to nearby villages to announce the feast, to a ceremonial re-enactment of this tradition at the start of each *Kivġiq,* and 3) shifting from only the whaling captains hosting and funding *Kivġiq* to it being a shared community celebration, largely planned by the Borough with support from the regional and village corporations and sponsors.[92]

Similarities and Differences

All three of these highlighted Iñupiaq communities (including Uŋalaqłiq) were strongly influenced by Christian missionaries to abandon ancestral traditions and ways of life around the turn of the twentieth century, and all three (alongside all other colonized indigenous communities) experience disproportionate rates of social ills that befall peoples' loss of identity, culture and traditions.

For both Nuurvik and Utqiaġvik, the decision to bring tradition back –whether in the form of singing and dancing or a particular feast – was driven internally within the community, and the resources to enact their vision were funded within the community. I feel this is the direction Uŋalaqłiq may move, should we decide to do so.

Another key similarity between Uŋalaqłiq and Nuurvik is the deep love of the local Church by the community, and the necessity of working closely together in light of this need to move forward in a good way that would not divide the community. Though the Bering Straits region does not have the financial wealth of the north slope, there is a strong regional nonprofit, Kawerak,

[92] Ikuta, 352.

which is a beacon of cultural strength for the communities they serve, and could be a strong partner moving forward.

Key differences among these case studies are the wide gap in the cost each community expended to bring their traditions back; though it wasn't monetized in the Nuurvik articles, it seems likely the costs was largely contained to the transportation, food and lodging of dancers from nearby villages for the weeklong intensive lessons, and the cost of materials and perhaps a stipend for the elder who built their drums – it is likely this would be the path forward for Uŋalaqłiq. For the 1988 *Kivġiq*, however, the cost was upwards of $200,000.[93]

Another potential difference could be the role of the church in supporting/providing permission – there is little documentation of what (if any) role the Presbyterian church played in supporting the return of their *Kivġiq*, though as a personal note upon attending Kivġiq, having observed nearly a full day of singspiration – singing Gospel songs both in Iñupiaq and English – and very intentional space created for Christian prayer throughout *Kivġiq* and other community celebrations, I believe it is likely the church was/is supportive.

There is interest within the Evangelical Covenant Church, including in Uŋalaqłiq, to engage in further dialogue about healing, reconciliation and restoration, work that will continue beyond the scope of this research – a critical component of healing and moving forward.

Our children are waking up hungry…What are we going to feed them?

Below, a detailing of work within FAI that I have personally engaged in. After much consideration, I chose not to anonymize the information since much – if not all – of the

[93] Ikuta, 353.

information regarding our proceedings have been made available within our public Native Village of Unalakleet Facebook page.

At the request of the Principal of the Uŋalaqłiq school in October of 2017, two staff of FAI – including myself – traveled there to help address bullying issues that had arisen in the school and community. Prior to traveling up there for this work, I met with representatives of the tribe, city and school leadership to ask that they partner with us on a bigger community conversation tied to this topic within the school, focused on supporting the success of our youth. They agreed, and helped to plan and provide logistical support throughout the whole process.

Rather than speak directly to the act of bullying with the youth, we chose to engage the middle and high school students in an exercise of naming their aspirations for Uŋalaqłiq. The students were separated into small groups and asked to consider the question, "In 2117 (100 years from now) what will Unalakleet be like?" and instructed to take notes on their conversations.

After a time, we began reading what the students had written down, and were taken aback to see that they had written comments like,

More people, less social communication, less respectful

Not living through our Inupiaq values

Our languages would be hanging on by a thread, or forgotten

Pollution. Endangered animals, subsistence will be low

The land cracked up and more climate change

Unalakleet will look like a ghost town because everyone moved on the hills, the old village covered up by water

Unalakleet is gonna be gone, it will be drowned

Reading these notes, we realized that though we had intended to ask the students what they *wanted* Uŋalaqłiq to be like in 100 years, we had simply asked what it will be like… and that the youth were describing the future they see based on *their experience.* It was a sobering moment to realize what the youth of today are seeing and experiencing.

The students were then asked to write the future they *want it to be* in Uŋalaqłiq in 100 years. This time, the notes reflected a very different outlook:

Less hungry, less drinking and drugs

Learning Inupiaq values and leadership skills like how they did long time ago

Respecting our elders and connected families – more elders speaking

I hope we find a way to keep our language and culture alive for a long long time

Grow in friendship and culture – have our Native lands

Peaceful, with strong salmon and caribou

Flying cars and hover objects, Elders will be more experienced with phones

Igloo has a drive-thru

We're dancing and singing again, passionate Inupiat/Yup'ik dancers

We asked the students to help identify the necessary changes in the community to move from the future we see coming to the one we want. All of their ideas were documented on large posters, crowd-sourced by the youth.

The following day, we hosted an open community conversation about supporting the success of our youth and posted the notes taken by our youth. We shared the exercise we had gone through together with them, and talked about the ways the youth are articulating that the distance between the future they see based on their lived experiences now, and the future they would like to

see, can be measured in the strength of the community's cultural knowledge and expression. We then led community members into brainstorming specific ways to strengthen the ancestral knowledge of the community. Topics identified included the need for a culture camp, integrating local cultural knowledge into the curriculum, and a concentrated effort to bring singing and dancing back to the community.

The youth of Uŋalaqłiq demonstrated a strong hunger for our traditional ways, and a deep desire to bring singing and dancing back. The community has affirmed this desire, and wishes to make steps toward the awakening of these ancestral practices. I have personally witnessed Uŋalaqłiq elders watching other communities sing and dance with great yearning and joy, and feel that taking this approach can bring the kind of intergenerational healing experience that was shared in the preface of this paper.

To advance these expressed desires, potential solutions moving forward could include working with the community, including the school and Church to find and create safe Native spaces for knowledge sharing and healing, potentially with a *qargi* model.

Moving Forward

Potential candidates and times to create these spaces include within Uŋalaqłiq can include the school, church, local tribe and community activities. Within the school, there can be an integration of quarterly Iñupiaq Days for students to engage in a day of learning about knowledge specific to seasonal activities of that time of year.

As the Covenant Church hosts its annual summer Bible Camps – which are open to youth of all ages – it could provide an excellent time to model recognizing their painful history of suppression within the community, being clear that they recognize now that this was wrong, and

living their responsibility to help restore these traditions by incorporating them into the camp. I feel this could go a long way in helping the youth to truly be seen, to better understand the challenges we experience today, and to feel that our ancestral practices are valuable and valued – leading to a stronger sense of pride in our identity, and grounding in who we are.

During annual meetings of the Native Village of Unalakleet tribal members, the tribe itself could engage in a *qargi* space to discuss the future we desire for our community, and plan for the steps the tribe can take to move in that direction. There is a strong desire to begin a culture camp, which would be an ideal space to dialogue through the changes that have occurred in our community and integrate the knowledge transmission of our ancestral traditions.

To advance progress in these areas, one step could be to convene members of the local school district and school, tribe and city to discuss the alignment of various efforts identified during the community gathering in October 2017, identify other important contributors, and strategize timing together. From there, we can map out timing to host a planning meeting, and identify barriers to successfully incorporating (plus solutions to overcome those challenges). Incorporated within these steps is working together to identify a timeline for rolling out various parts to this strategy (which could include: ongoing curriculum development and integration, alignment of funding/efforts from the school district and Tribe [which has substantial funding for suicide prevention], working with the Covenant Church to include healing spaces within their various convenings, etc.

This strategy builds on efforts that have already happened within the community, doesn't necessarily require a great deal of funding capital to begin, and can harness the energy of youth to help make progress faster. If the youth feel ownership of this renaissance, they will grow into their responsibility of bearing pride of their culture through their adulthood, parenthood, and eldership.

There is also an interesting irony to utilizing an assimilationist system that removed our knowledge to help reinstate it.

Healing takes many forms – taking steps to acknowledge the harms that have been committed, talking openly in safe spaces about the hurts we have carried (whether consciously or unconsciously) and finding ways to bring back ancestral practices such as singing and dancing – and expression of strength in who we are, and our rich history and knowledge – all contribute to the healthy wellbeing of our community.

Everything we want to be today, our Ancestors already were.
What we're trying to achieve isn't impossible; it already was.
We come from perfection.

– *Apapigainaq AlexAnna Salmon (Yup'ik of Igiugig)*

Findings

A motivating factor that led me to pursue this research was encountering a chasm of understanding the historical timeline and players involved in putting our ancestral practices to sleep in my community. While there is a general awareness that missionaries played a role in the suppression of our practices, little is known (throughout Alaska) about the intentional steps taken by Sheldon Jackson and others to supplant our intact knowledge systems with a two-handed approach to convert our savage, barbarous customs to the saving graces of Christianity and quickly assimilate us into a Western society by forcibly cutting us off from our very selves. This research weaves together a timeline of missionizing events in Uŋalaqɬiq with a broader timeline of how these efforts were carried out throughout Alaska.

Additionally, this research supports an understanding of the healing and strengthening nature of some of the very customs that were suppressed through this era, and provide a glimpse into other Iñupiaq communities' efforts to awaken and bring them back into practice.

At the front-end of this research, I was not expecting to be blind-sided by the intense mental, spiritual, emotional and even physical impacts that it would have on my wellbeing. Over time, it became abundantly clear that I carried a responsibility to make this struggle visible in the writing of my project. To not do so would contribute to the ongoing erasure of how this colonial educational system continues to cause harm to Native students today.

While it is not considered professional to express emotion or bias in academic writing, I feel I am being more transparent with my truth than other scholars who may have simply hid theirs through more opaque "neutral" writing.

Recommendations for Future Research

In researching Sheldon Jackson, there was an overwhelming amount of literature that idolized him and heralded his efforts with Native students across Alaska. A prolific writer who wrote countless articles, reports, and other writings related to his strong philosophies associated with Native education, I think scholars could find a rich source of material to re-analyze with a decolonial lens for deeper, continuing impacts on our Native society today.

Thankfully, there are many Native scholars who have or are currently uplifting the healing nature of the *qargi* and ancestral ceremonies such as *Kivgiq*. I feel that there is a tremendous opportunity to share these efforts through our own storytelling methodologies that could inspire further revitalization of these important practices.

Additionally, while only briefly mentioned in this research, I believe there is an important opportunity to re-tell the Evangelical Covenant Church history in a more holistic, humble, and repentant way than I have seen. This can, and should, include contemporary efforts of church leadership to engage in understanding how to approach formal recognition of the harms that they have caused, and exploring their responsibility to spend at least as much human and financial capital on restoration as was spent on taking it away.

Conclusion

Uŋalaqɬiq has a rich history that includes thousands of years of ancestral traditions that made our community strong. The loss of practices such as utilizing the *qargi* for intergenerational learning and cultural celebration, and of the *Kivġiq* celebration has caused the loss of connection to practices that have kept the Iñupiat across Alaska strong for thousands of years.

As shown in this research, Uŋalaqɬiq youth have a sophisticated understanding of how current experiences shape a bleak future for our people. They clearly see the connection between the loss of culture and further harms that follow. They have articulated that the difference between the future they see and the future they desire for their people, is the strengthening of cultural traditions, including speaking Iñupiatun and singing and dancing again.

Though there has been a disruption in our ancestral practices, and the history of how that happened is deeply uncomfortable (and even traumatic) to speak of, learning the true history and understanding the ways in which cultural practices have helped to keep the community strong can bring the very medicine that is needed to strengthen our community again.

To move towards a future where Native peoples are living, loving and breathing the fullness of our cultural traditions (which is inclusive of modern-day iterations of them) will require that the community be open to the first step of talking about what has happened to our people. To do this, we must allow for and create the necessary space for truth-telling, so that healing can move forward. This can begin by bringing back a modern-day iteration of the *qargi* space – simply bringing men and women into separate, safe spaces to deliberate their experiences, including the roots of their challenges, and their unique and critical roles to overcome them. The momentum can continue by moving into a larger community dialogue about the future of the community, and how to work together to engage in the practices that help Native peoples to be strong.

In Aotearoa (New Zealand) our Indigenous Māori *whānau* (family) have shared with FAI stories of their own revitalization of Indigenous traditions. One such story noted that the genesis of their now 33,000+ students strong tertiary institution, *Te Wananga O Aotearoa*, began with the building of one *marae* (their traditional community house, similar in nature to the *qargi*) on a cleared landfill lot – the only space they could afford at that time.

Through donations to the effort, Māori men built the *marae* alongside their youth, using the opportunity to engage, learn and teach their traditional knowledge at the same time. Perhaps Uŋalaqɬiq and other communities could consider this approach to rebuilding a *qargi* structure. A dear friend and brother, *Maaguk* Warren Jones (Yup'ik) from Naparyaq (Hooper Bay) has been deeply engaged in work to bring the Yup'ik *qasgiq* (very similar to the Iñupiat *qargi*) back into use within Igiugig and potentially other communities with a similar tradition, such as Noolaaghe Doh.

We now have the perspective of how more than a century of suppression of our ancestral traditions stemming from the missionary-era in Alaska has negatively impacted the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples – including within Uŋalaqɬiq. We stand at the precipice of awakening cultural practices that have been demonstrated – with thousands of years of thrival to prove – to keep our community healthy and strong.

A driving force in my work and schooling is to live up to the responsibility that is passed down to us through our ancestors. What will our future ancestors 100+ years into the future have to say about what we have done with this opportunity? It is my deepest desire that those very ancestors will be living and breathing our Iñupiaq ways of life, offering up gratitude that their ancestors forged the path back to who we have always been.

I am reminded of this tremendous honor and duty when I read the following unfinished quote, written on a scrap of paper by my grandpa *Talialuk*. The very fact that it is an unfinished thought reminds me of the work yet to be done that we all carry responsibility for in our time here:

We must change our directions.
Little by littles.
Like mountains these problems are before us.
We start our climb now, for there may not be tomorrow.
Physically, climbing the heart beat seems faster than our steps,

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